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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2029
TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR BU
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: ADVANCING U.S. INTERESTS IN MEETING WITH
SECRETARY-DESIGNATE

Classified By: AMB Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Ivalyo Kalfin has made a strong case for a meeting with Secretary-designate Clinton following her confirmation. Bulgaria is struggling to deal with the energy crisis and to reverse Moscow's long-standing energy dominance - Kalfin wants the United States to be part of the solution. As NATO looks to increase its troop presence in Afghanistan, Kalfin has promised that Bulgaria will step up with its share of the increase and do even more on the civilian and counter-narcotics effort. On Georgia, Ukraine and Kosovo - our key regional issues - Kalfin's thinking is directly in line with our own. He is smart, honest and a rare positive force in this fractious political setting. A meeting in February or March (before the NATO summit) would serve our interests. End Summary.

¶2. (C) We have four strategic priorities here; Kalfin is instrumental for each. Energy: The cutoff of natural gas from Russia has prompted Bulgaria to rethink its over-dependence on Moscow. If the EU is to develop a coherent energy policy and diversify sources and transit routes, Bulgaria will be at the heart of the equation. Sofia will host an April 24-25 energy summit; through early engagement we can shape its outcome.

NATO Summit: Relations with Russia and NATO enlargement are key to Bulgaria's eastern policy. It supports NATO membership for Macedonia and MAP for Ukraine and Georgia.

Afghanistan: NATO's sternest test. Bulgaria has quadrupled its forces and is open to doing more, but the public is wary and looming elections mean that the government must raise its voice and its game.

Regional Stability: Bulgaria recognized Kosovo and hosts U.S. military exercises, important for Southeastern Europe and Black Sea stability. Kalfin is the architect for Bulgaria on these issues.

¶3. (C) Bulgaria has pulled more than its weight internationally, and has the capacity to do more. An early meeting will lock Bulgaria even closer to our interests prior to both April Summits.

McEldowney